

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
IO-13 ACDA-12 /091 W
-----099435 071908Z /43

R 071430Z JUN 78
FM AMCONSUL STUTTGART
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4383
AMEMBASSY BONN
INFO USMISSION USBERLIN
AMCONSUL BREMEN
AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT
AMCONSUL HAMBURG
AMCONSUL MUNICH
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 STUTTGART 1104

USCINCEUR AND CINCUSAREUR FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GW
SUBJECT: THE "FILBINGER AFFAIR" -- THE HEIRS APPARENT

REF: STUTTGART 1078

1. SUMMARY -- SHOULD FILBINGER STEP DOWN -- AND THERE IS NO
INDICATION HE WILL -- DUE TO THE CONTROVERSY STILL BEING
GENERATED BY THE "FILBINGER AFFAIR," BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG
INTERIOR MINISTER SPAETH OR STUTTGART'S LORD MAYOR ROMMEL
WOULD SEEM THE LIKELIEST CANDIDATES TO SUCCEED FILBINGER AS
MINISTER-PRESIDENT. SPAETH'S CHANCES SEEM SLIGHT ALONGSIDE
THOSE OF ROMMEL, WHO HAS THE CHARISMA AND THE EXPERIENCE TO
PROVIDE LEADERSHIP AND ELECTORAL STRENGTH TO THE CDU, BUT
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ROMMEL WOULD MUCH PREFER TO BE A CABINET MINISTER IN BONN
SOULD THE CDU ONE DAY REGAIN POWER AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL. YET
IN THE MEANTIME, BECOMING MINISTER-PRESIDENT WOULD STILL BE A
STEP UP THE POLITICAL LADDER FOR ROMMEL, WHO CONCEDES THAT HE
WOULD DO HIS PARTY'S BIDDING IF EVER HE SHOULD BE TAPPED TO
TAKE OVER AS MINISTER-PRESIDENT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE "FILBINGER AFFAIR" CONTINUES TO GENERATE STATEMENTS PRO AND CON IN THE PRESS. FRANZ JOSEF STRAUSS HAS SPOKEN OUT AGAINST THE "CHARACTER ASSASSINATION" OF WHICH FILBINGER IS THE TARGET; BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG'S INTERIOR MINISTER LOTHAR SPAETH HAS ATTACKED THE SPD FOR DEMANDING FILBINGER'S RESIGNATION AND, HE ALLEGES, IN SO DOING SEEKING TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN FILBINGER AND HIS PARTY (THE CDU); AND HEINZ GALINSKI, PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF JEWS IN BERLIN, HAS JOINED THOSE CALLING FOR FILBINGER'S RESIGNATION.

3. FILBINGER HIMSELF HAS SAID NOTHING ABOUT ANY PROSPECT OF RESIGNING BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT SCANDAL (THOUGH WE UNDERSTAND THAT MRS. FILBINGER HAS PRIVATELY DECREED "NEVER*"). RESIGNATION WOULD, OF COURSE, BE TANTAMOUNT TO ADMITTING THAT THE ANTI-FILBINGER CAMPAIGN HAD TURNED UP EVIDENCE SUPPORTING CHARGES THAT FILBINGER IS UNFIT TO REMAIN IN OFFICE, AND THE "EVIDENCE," SUCH AS IT IS, HAS CONSISTENTLY BEEN DENIED OR EXPLAINED AWAY BY FILBINGER. AND IT IS NOT LIKE THE MAN TO CAVE UNDER PRESSURE.

4. WE WERE IMPRESSED DURING A VISIT TO FREIBURG LAST WEEK AT HOW FILBINGER'S IMAGE SEEMS TO HAVE DETERIORATED, AT LEAST IN SOME CIRCLES IN THAT CORNER OF BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG. IN OUR CONVERSATION WITH UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS THE PICTURE EMERGED OF A FILBINGER WHO IS DEEMED TO HAVE BECOME RUTHLESS AS A POLITICIAN AND ONE PROFESSOR WENT SO FAR AS TO SEE A PARALLEL BETWEEN THE METHODS OF FILBINGER AND THOSE OF EX-PRESIDENT NIXON.
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ACADEMIC CIRCLES IN FREIBURG SEEM STILL TO BE SMARING, HOWEVER, OVER WHAT THEY CONSIDER THE HEAVY-HANDED MANNER IN WHICH FILBINGER, WITHOUT ADVANCE CONSULTATION, REVAMPED THE BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND INSTALLED PROF. HELMUT ENGLER, FORMER RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FREIBURG AND A RATHER CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE IN HIS OWN RIGHT, AS NEW MINISTER OF SCIENCE. APROPOS OF THE QUESTION OF WHETHER FILBINGER DID NOR DID NOT MOVE IN NAZI CIRCLES IN FREIBURG IN HIS STUDENT DAYS (REFTEL), WE WERE FORTUNATE TO MEET IN FREIBURG A RETIRED PROFESSOR WHO HAD KNOWN FILBINGER WELL IN THOSE DAYS. FILBINGER, HE SAID, WAS THEN KNOWN AS AN ANTI-NAZI AND HE MOVED IN ANTI-NAZI CIRCLES, THOUGH OBVIOUSLY HE HAD TO "MASQUERADE" TO HIDE HIS REAL SENTIMENTS. THOSE WHO DIDN'T "MASQUERADE," NOTED THE PROFESSOR PENSIVELY, AREN'T ALIVE TODAY.

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IO-13 ACDA-12 /091 W
-----099656 071908Z /43

R 071430Z JUN 78
FM AMCONSUL STUTTGART
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5. ONE COULD ALSO ARGUE HOWEVER, THAT IT MIGHT BE INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT FOR FILBINGER TO REMAIN ON AS MINISTER-PRESIDENT IF THE SCANDAL SURROUNDING HIS NAME SERIOUSLY ALIENATES THE LECTORATE IN BADEN-WUERTEMBERG AND HIS CONTINUATION IN OFFICE THREATENS TO WEAKEN THE CDU AND AS A CONSEQUENCE THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS SHOWING IN THE 1980 LANDTAGE ELECTIONS. THINGS HAVE NOT YET TAKEN SO BAD A TURN THAT THERE IS OPEN SEASON FOR SPECULATION ON WHO MIGHT SUCCEED FILBINGER IF HE WERE TO STEP DOWN, THOUGH THE TWO MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES WOULD SEEM TO BE INTERIOR MINISTER SPAETH AND STUTTGART'S LORD MAYOR ROMMEL.

6. SPAETH, WHO ROSE FROM CDU FRAKTION LEADER TO INTERIOR MINISTER IN THE LAND GOVERNMENT EARLIER THIS YEAR, SEEMS CONTENT WITH HIS NEW PROMINENCE AND CLEARLY ASPIRES TO BIGGER THINGS.
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HOWEVER, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT HE IS YET READY FOR THEM. HIS IS NOT YET A HOUSEHOLD NAME IN BADEN-WUERTEMBERG AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE HIM LEADING THE PARTY INTO THE 1980 ELECTIONS.

7. ROMMEL, HOWEVER, HAS BOTH CHARISMA AND EXPERIENCE AND WOULD BE A STRONG ELECTORIA DRAWING CARD. THE ONLY PROBLEM IS THAT HE DOES NOT WANT TO BECOME MINISTER-PRESIDENT. ROMMEL TOLD ME ON

JUNE 5 THAT HE SEES HIS FUTURE ON THE NATIONAL AND NOT THE LAND SCENE. HE SEES HIMSELF MOVING ON FROM THE STUTTGART RATHAUS TO A CABINET POSITION IN BONN IF AND WHEN THE CDU REGAINS THE CHANCELLORSHIP. THE POSITION HE REALLY ASPIRES TO IS THAT OF FINANCE MINISTER. WE NOTED THAT IN THE EVENT OF FILBINGER'S RESIGNATION STRONG PRESSURE MIGHT BE BROUGHT TO BEAR TO HAVE HIM (ROMMEL) STEP IN TO SHORE UP A PARTY WEAKENED BY THE FILBINGER SCANDAL AND LEAD IT TO VICTORY IN THE 1980 ELECTION. WOULD HE THEREFORE NOT ACCEPT THE MINISTER-PRESIDENCY UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES? ROMMEL SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT SEEK THE MINISTER-PRESIDENCY, BUT SHOULD FILBINGER RESIGN AND THE PARTY LEADERSHIP COME TO HIM AND ASK HIM TO BECOME MINISTER-PRESIDENT HE DID NOT FEEL THAT UNDER THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES HE COULD REFUSE. HE WOULD DO WHAT THE PARTY WANTED.

8. COMMENT: DURING THE ABOVE RELAXED CONVERSATION, ROMMEL WAS HIS USUAL MODEST, EASYGOING, WITTY SELF. HE HAS BEEN CLOSE TO FILBINGER AND, WE THINK, HAS GENUINE AFFECTION FOR THE MAN. HE IS NOT ACTIVELY SEEKING TO SUCCEED FILBINGER BUT, IF NOMINATED, WILL SERVE. WE ARE NOT SO CONFIDENT AS IS ROMMEL THAT HIS OWN POLITICAL AMBITIONS AND FUTURE WOULD BE LESS WELL-SERVED IF HE BECOMES MINISTER-PRESIDENT. THE MINISTER-PRESIDENCY MIGHT, AFTER ALL, BE CLOSER IN TIME FOR HIM THAN A RETURN OF THE CDU TO POWER IN BONN OR TO HIS UNCERTAIN NOMINATION TO THE POSITION HE WOULD LIKE IN THAT EVENTUAL GOVERNMENT. ROMMEL, HELPED NOT ONLY BY HIS NAME BUT BY HIS UNORTHODOX AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL CONFIDENTIAL

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PERFORMANCE AS STUTTGART'S LORD MAYOR, HAS ALREADY ACQUIRED A POSITION OF NATIONAL PROMINENCE. (HE WILL, FOR EXAMPLE, CURTAIL A VISIT THIS SUMMER TO ST. LOUIS, STUTTGART'S SISTER CITY, IN ORDER TO RETURN TO FULFILL SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS IN HESSE IN SUPPORT OF DREGGER.) BECOMING MINISTER-PRESIDENT OF BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG WOULD PROVIDE ROMMEL, IF ONLY TEMPORARILY, WITH A HIGHER AND MORE VISIBLE PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO EXERCISE HIS POLITICAL SKILLS AND TO PREPARE THE NEXT STEP IN HIS POLITICAL CAREER. FILBINGER MAY HOLD NOT ONLY THE KEY TO HIS OWN IMMEDIATE POLITICAL FUTURE BUT ALSO TO ROMMEL'S. ROMMEL, ANYWAY, INSISTS THAT FILBINGER IS STILL NOT DISPOSED TO RESIGN. "HE SHOWS EVERY INDICATION," SAID ROMMEL, "OF WANTING TO SAY ON IN THE JOB UNTIL HE'S NEARLY A HUNDRED." MILLER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LITIGATION, WAR CRIMES, WORLD WAR II
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STUTTGO1104
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780238-0405
Format: TEL
From: STUTTGART
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780684/aaaacuku.tel
Line Count: 215
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 2dcddcc8f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STUTTGART 1078
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2447364
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE \"FILBINGER AFFAIR\" -- THE HEIRS APPARENT
TAGS: PINT, GE, (FILBINGER, HANS)
To: STATE BONN
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2dcddcc8f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014